

2.4 Tanana Flats Survival Shelters

USAG-AK has proposed to place five survival shelters at locations throughout the TFTA. These shelters will be placed in high-traffic, easily accessible areas (Figure 10). The purpose of placing these shelters is to provide a place where recreational land users, hunters, trappers and others can go in emergency situations to get out of the elements. These small structures will have a heating stove, fuel, and food available inside. The shelters are intended for emergency use only, and not for recreational use. The shelters are 80in. wide, 120in. long, and 74.5in. tall (Figure 11).

The survival shelters will be airlifted to their final locations via a Chinook helicopter. The shelters will be fully constructed before being unloaded from the aircraft. After being removed from the aircraft, installation of the stove and other finish work will be completed on site. The survival shelters will also be anchored to the ground with guy wires.

In order to place the shelters in their final locations, some brush and tree clearing will be required at each location in order to have a large enough helicopter landing zone and shelter placement area. This clearing work will be done by hand.

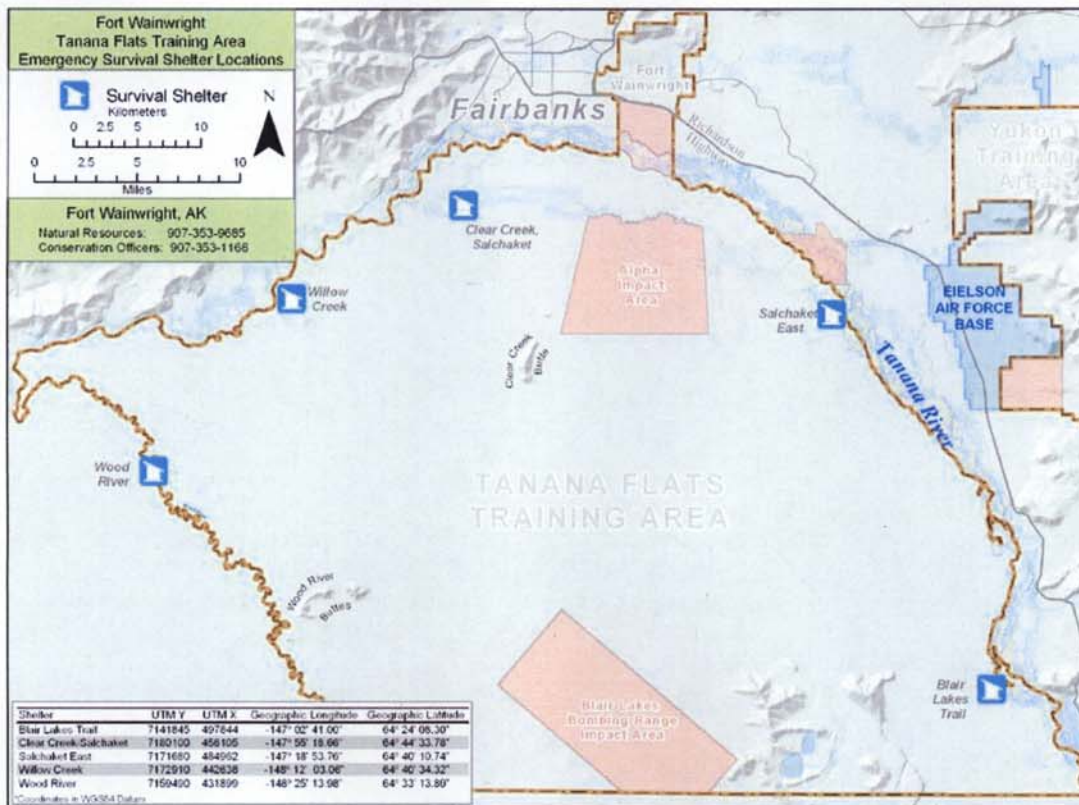


Figure 10. Location of Survival Shelters in the Tanana Flats Training Area

Survey and Field Methods

In June 2004 the post archaeologist and the survival shelter project manager, employed by CEMML, conducted a helicopter reconnaissance of the five proposed survival shelter locations. Based on this aerial reconnaissance, the post archaeologist determined that

two of the five locations needed further on-the-ground investigations. A total of three locations were ultimately investigated on the ground.

Pedestrian transects in the proposed project areas were walked at approximately 20m intervals. All shovel tests were approximately 40cm x 40cm, and were screened through ¼in. hardware cloth.

The project areas for the survival shelter placements are located away from any known, ground-based training activities in the TFTA. Additionally, no evidence of military use of the immediate vicinity was noted during survey activities. Historic, non-military uses of the TFTA are not well documented. It is unlikely that the Training Area was ever seriously explored for mineral deposits. The area consists primarily of bogs and muskegs with silt and sand deposits below. There are likely no valuable mineral deposits located within the Training Area other than, perhaps, on buttes or other hilly areas (Neely 2001). One major known mining era cultural resource within the TFTA is the Bonnifield Trail. This trail begins at the south end of Cushman Street in Fairbanks and crosses the Tanana Flats to the headwaters of Bonnifield Creek on the northern margins of the Alaska Range. There may be several roadhouses within the Training Area associated with the Trail, but they have not yet been located on the ground (Neely 2003). The Bonnifield Trail is over 25 miles west of the current project area. Homestead research to date has uncovered little regarding the TFTA (Price 2002).



Figure 11. Survival shelter (under construction) to be placed in the Tanana Flats Training Area

The five final survival shelter locations are described below.

Salchaket East Survival Shelter

This proposed survival shelter location is on a narrow, almost dry, slough that connects to the main channel of Salchaket Slough, on its east end. The location is an overgrown gravel bar with dense willow and other shrub vegetation growing on it. This location was viewed from the air (Figure 12) and was not investigated on the ground. The gravel bar will need to be cleared of most of the existing vegetation in order to create a landing zone for a Chinook helicopter to deposit the cabin. The location has a low probability for containing unknown cultural resources. No further investigation is recommended.



Figure 12. Aerial view of Salchaket East survival shelter location

5 Mile Clear Creek Survival Shelter

This proposed survival shelter location is near the intersection of two winter trails, approximately 800m west of the Tanana River (Figure 13). The trail that the cabin will be placed adjacent to is overgrown with willow, rose, iris, fireweed, small spruce trees, and other low vegetation. The area adjacent to the trail, where the cabin will be placed, is a typical black spruce forest with scattered alder and birch trees in addition to abundant labrador, rose, mosses and other low vegetation. This location was viewed from the air and was not investigated on the ground. Spruce trees and low vegetation will need to be cleared at this location in order to create a landing zone for a Chinook helicopter. Neither of the trails that the cabin will be placed adjacent to are major nor named; they are well-used winter trails, however. The cabin is not being placed within the trails' right-of-way. The location has a low probability for containing unknown cultural resources. No further investigation is recommended.



Figure 13. General vicinity of 5 Mile Clear Creek shelter location

Willow Creek Survival Shelter

This proposed survival shelter location is at the boundary of a forest/grass interface (Figure 14) on the edge of a dry slough. The post archaeologist, survival cabin project manager, and a forester visited this location. On both sides of the dry slough are low ridges which are former creek banks. Between the dry slough and the current creek channel is the westernmost of these two ridges. The survival cabin will be located on the western edge of the dry slough. In order to place the cabin, several trees and some low brush will need to be removed. A short path (approximately 20m long) will also be brushed over the low ridge between the current creek channel and the cabin location. One shovel test was excavated in this area, along the path. No cultural material was found.



Figure 14. Willow Creek survival shelter location

The area in the vicinity of the survival shelter was also pedestrian surveyed. This survey located two culturally modified trees (CMTs), but no other signs of previous human activity. These trees were birch and had a strip of bark removed from around their trunks at some undetermined time in the past. The two trees were approximately 15m apart and located on the easternmost ridge paralleling the dry slough. The trees are approximately 100m south of the proposed survival cabin location and on the opposite side of the dry slough. These trees will not be impacted by the proposed project. Based

on the results of the pedestrian survey and testing, no further investigation is recommended.

Clear Creek/Salchaket Slough Survival Shelter

This proposed survival shelter location is along the bank of Clear Creek near its junction with Salchaket Slough. The post archaeologist, survival shelter project manager, and a forester visited this location. The shelter location is on an overgrown point bar vegetated by high grasses, berry bushes and small willow and alder trees (Figure 15). Immediately behind the proposed location is a small grove of cottonwood trees. One shovel test was excavated in this cottonwood grove. No cultural material was found. Pedestrian survey in the general vicinity located several stumps of previously cut trees, but no other evidence of past human activity. Based on the results of the pedestrian survey and testing, no further investigation is recommended.



Figure 15. Clear Creek/Salchaket Slough survival shelter location

Wood River Survival Shelter

This proposed survival shelter location is located on a terrace approximately 2m above the Wood River (Figure 16). The post archaeologist, survival cabin project manager, and a forestry crew visited this location. The area selected was chosen for shelter placement because it experienced a small burn and blow-down. Almost all of the trees within the area needed for a landing zone and shelter placement are already down. Only the removal of the downed trees and the cutting of a few standing trees are necessary to prepare this site.



Figure 16. Wood River survival shelter location

The shelter and landing zone area was well drained and fairly flat. Because of the previous burn and blow-down there were numerous exposed root wads. All exposed root wads were examined for cultural material and none was found. Three shovel tests were excavated just south of the proposed landing zone and shelter location along the same terrace where the cabin will be placed. The shovel test location was a flat area in an open spruce forest. The understory consisted primarily of horsetail, wild rose and mosses. None of the shovel tests located any cultural material and a reconnaissance of the general area surrounding the project location did not reveal any evidence of past human activity. Based on the results of the pedestrian survey and testing, no further investigation is recommended.

Cultural Resources

There are no known cultural resources located in the vicinity of any of the proposed survival shelter locations.

Results

Aerial reconnaissance, pedestrian survey and subsurface testing of the proposed project areas identified two culturally modified trees in the vicinity of the proposed Willow Creek survival shelter location. These trees will not be impacted by the proposed project. All other previously recorded archaeological sites or historic properties in the TFTA fall outside the proposed project areas for the placement of the survival shelters. USAG-AK has determined that no historic properties will be affected by the proposed project.

2.5 Birch Hill Ski Area Improvements

USAG-AK has proposed to construct a halfpipe at Birch Hill Ski Area, in the Fort Wainwright cantonment, for the purpose of skiing and snowboarding. Additionally, the snowmaking drain pond is to be repaired to its original state by removing silt and vegetation growing inside the pond. The drain line to the pond freezes underground making snowmaking operations impossible, and it is proposed that it be repaired by installing insulation and heat trace to the entire length of drain line. The parking lot will also be extended 20ft on the south and east sides by adding 1 to 2ft of fill, and fill will be added on the south side of the maintenance building.



Figure 17. Project areas for Birch Hill Ski Area improvements

Survey and Field Methods

In May 2004, an archaeological survey crew, comprised of three archaeologists employed by CEMML, conducted a pedestrian survey of the proposed undertakings (Figures 18 and 19). The survey area included 26.01 acres of the ski hill, including the halfpipe APE of 1.17 acres and 4.203 acre APE for the parking facility, maintenance area and snowmaking pond.

Parallel pedestrian transects spaced at 20m were walked in all areas that were not deemed too wet or too steep ($>40^\circ$) to contain cultural material. Systematic subsurface testing was undertaken in areas determined to be high probability (e.g., lake margins,

ridges, benches adjacent to steeper slopes) during initial review of the proposed project area, and as determined by the supervising archaeologist and field crew leader based on survey findings. Shovel tests were approximately 40cm x 40cm, and soils were screened through ¼in. hardware cloth. No cultural materials were identified or recovered during the field inventory.

Cultural Resources

Two known sites are located within 1km of the proposed project area. These include FAI-00199 and FAI-00461, neither of which is within the APE for this project. Following is a description of each recorded site near the currently proposed project area.

FAI-00199

Latitude:

Longitude:

Determination: Not eligible

Site FAI-00199 is located east of the Fort Wainwright Ski Slope, above the Chena River floodplain, and 1.5km north of the main Fort Wainwright complex (Dixon et al. 1980). One side notched point and two flakes of chert were observed in a gully at the base of a slope, previously disturbed by military activity and road construction. No subsurface testing has been conducted at this site. The UTM coordinates for the site are:

Recommendations

This site is located outside of the project area and will not be impacted by the proposed improvements. This site has previously been determined not eligible for the National Register on July 25, 1984. Because this site lies outside the APE for the proposed project, it was not re-evaluated to determine eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. If the APE is moved by later design alteration, or if further projects are proposed in the area, the site should be evaluated to determine eligibility due to the extensive period of time that has passed since its initial evaluation.

FAI-00461

Latitude:

Longitude:

Determination: Not evaluated

Site FAI-00461 is Historic Recreational Building #1187, located at Fort Wainwright. The building was constructed in 1942 during WWII to provide a recreational ski facility at Ladd Field's Ski Hill. Site FAI-00461 is a wood frame, shallow gable roofed building measuring 20ft wide by 120.6ft long.

Recommendations

This site is located outside of the project area and will not be impacted by the proposed improvements. Because this site lies outside the APE for the proposed project, it was not evaluated to determine eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. If the APE is moved by later design alteration, or if further projects are proposed in the area, the site should be evaluated to determine eligibility.

Results

Pedestrian survey and subsurface testing of the proposed project areas failed to identify any cultural resources within the boundaries of the halfpipe and parking facility, maintenance area and snowmaking pond proposed project areas. All previously recorded archaeological sites or historic properties fall outside the proposed project areas. USAG-AK has determined that the proposed projects will have no effect on historic properties.



Figure 18. View of parking area, maintenance facility, and snowmaking pond project areas



Figure 19. Birch Hill Ski Slope, location of proposed halfpipe